

## Appendix D

Jonathan Priday/USFWS



*Sunrise on the refuge*

## Wilderness Review



## Introduction

The purpose of a wilderness review is to identify and recommend to Congress lands and waters of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Wilderness reviews are required elements of comprehensive conservation plans, are conducted in accordance with the refuge planning process outlined in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (602 FW 1 and 3), and include compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and public involvement.

The wilderness review process has three phases: inventory; study; and, recommendation. Lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness are identified in the inventory phase. These areas are called wilderness study areas (WSAs). In the study phase, a range of management alternatives are evaluated to determine if a WSA is suitable for wilderness designation or management under an alternate set of goals and objectives that do not involve wilderness designation.

The recommendation phase consists of forwarding or reporting the suitable recommendations from the Director through the Secretary and the President to Congress in a wilderness study report. The wilderness study report is prepared after the record of decision for the final CCP has been signed. Areas recommended for designation are managed to maintain wilderness character in accordance with management goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in the final CCP until Congress makes a decision or the CCP is amended to modify or remove the wilderness proposal.

## Phase I. Wilderness Inventory

### Introduction

The wilderness inventory is a broad look at each planning area (Wilderness Inventory Area [WIA]) to identify WSAs. A WSA is an area of undeveloped Federal land that retains its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, and further, meets the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.

### Minimum Wilderness Criteria

A WSA is required to be a roadless area or an island of any size, meet the size criteria, appear natural, and provide for solitude or primitive recreation.

*Roadless* — Roadless refers to the absence of improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use. A route maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road. Only Federal lands are eligible to be considered for wilderness designation and inclusion within the NWPS.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the roadless criteria.

- A. The area does not contain improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- B. The area is an island, or contains an island that does not have improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- C. The area is in Federal fee title ownership.

*Size* — The size criteria can be satisfied if an area has at least 5,000 acres of contiguous roadless public land, or is sufficiently large that its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition is practicable.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the size criteria.

- A. An area of more than 5,000 contiguous acres. State and private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.
- B. A roadless island of any size. A roadless island is defined as an area surrounded by permanent waters or that is markedly distinguished from the surrounding lands by topographical or ecological features.
- C. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous Federal acres that is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and of a size suitable for wilderness management.
- D. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous acres that is contiguous with a designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, or area under wilderness review by another Federal wilderness managing agency such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

*Naturalness* — The Wilderness Act, Section 2(c), defines wilderness as an area that “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.” The area must appear natural to the average visitor, rather than “pristine.” The presence of historic landscape conditions is not required.

An area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole. Significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity and the physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities are also considered in evaluating the naturalness criteria.

An area may not be considered unnatural in appearance solely on the basis of the sights and sounds of human impacts and activities outside the boundary of the unit. The cumulative effects of these factors in conjunction with land base size, physiographic and vegetative characteristics were considered in the evaluation of naturalness.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating naturalness.

- A. The area appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.
- B. The area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole.
- C. Does the area contain significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity?
- D. The presence of physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities.

*Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation.*—A WSA must provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and does not need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre. Further, an area does not have to be open to public use and access to qualify under this criteria; Congress has designated a number of wilderness areas in the Refuge System that are closed to public access to protect resource values.

Opportunities for solitude refer to the ability of a visitor to be alone and secluded from other visitors in the area. Primitive and unconfined recreation means non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport. These primitive recreation activities may provide opportunities to experience challenge and risk; self reliance; and adventure. These two elements are not well defined by the Wilderness Act, but can be expected to occur together in most cases. However, an outstanding opportunity for solitude may be present in an area offering only limited primitive recreation potential. Conversely, an area may be so attractive for recreation use that experiencing solitude is not an option.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation.

- A. The area offers the opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds and evidence of other people. A visitor to the area should be able to feel alone or isolated.
- B. The area offers non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport.

*Supplemental Values.*— The Wilderness Act states that an area of wilderness may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value. Supplemental values of the area are optional, but the degree to which their presence enhances the area's suitability for wilderness designation should be considered. The evaluation should be based on an assessment of the estimated abundance or importance of each of the features.

### **Eastern Neck Island**

The CCP planning team identified Eastern Neck Island (Map D.1) as the only wilderness inventory area on the refuge since the refuge is composed of and comprises the entire island. The Service owns all of the 2,286 acres in Federal fee title. The CCP Planning Team evaluated the island to determine if it retained its primeval character and influence, was without permanent improvements or human habitation, and further, met the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. Our findings are described below.

Does the wilderness inventory area:

- 1) *have at least 5,000 acres of land, or is it of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unconfined condition, or is it a roadless island?*

No. County Route 445 (Eastern Neck Island Road) runs down the middle of the island. It is a county owned and maintained road to Bogles Wharf and is open year round, 24 hours a day. South of the junction to Bogles Wharf it becomes a refuge maintained road, and the primary access to refuge headquarters. Several other refuge roads provide access to parking areas and other refuge facilities, and further split undeveloped tracts on the island.

*2) generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable?*

No. We describe the road network's impact on naturalness in item (1) above. In addition, nearly 25 percent of the island is managed as cropland, primarily to provide a food source for wintering Canada geese and waterfowl. The island has been farmed for over 200 years. Additionally, the refuge offers several visitor facilities and activities which detract from the naturalness of the area. Facilities include a visitor center, observation platform, boardwalk, campground, and several trails and parking lots.

*3a) have outstanding opportunities for solitude?*

No. Roads and parking lots provide vehicle access to visitors; most visitors tour the refuge by automobile. The nearly six miles of roads and trails, open to visitors most of the year, divide the island into smaller units that make it difficult for visitors to feel alone or isolated. Cropland and invasive plant management activities, including the use of large mechanical equipment, occur through all but the winter months. Other activities available to visitors like bicycling, dog walking, and group tours, although restricted, also decrease opportunities for solitude.

*3b) have outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?*

No. Off-road or off-trail access is not allowed except during the white tailed deer hunting season which is highly regulated.

*4) contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

Yes. The Federal-listed endangered Delmarva fox squirrel has been documented on Eastern Neck Island, but observations in recent years are down to only 1 or 2 squirrels a year. The Recovery Team has determined that the island is no longer contributing to the recovery of the species because of the low population and the fact it is an isolated island population. The recently delisted bald eagle also occurs here and remains protected under other mandates. The island is a major feeding and resting place for migratory and wintering waterfowl. The refuge headquarters lodge is eligible for the National Historic Register.

## Summary of Wilderness Inventory Findings

The CCP Planning Team found that the island does not meet any of the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. While there are ecological and historic values on the refuge, these do not, in and of themselves, warrant wilderness recommendation. In summary, Eastern Neck Refuge does not qualify as a WSA, and will not be considered further for wilderness designation in this CCP.

Map D.1. Eastern Neck Refuge and Existing Infrastructure

